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THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

DDI #1520-82
23 February 1982

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

VIA : Deputy Director for Intelligence

FROM : Acting Chairman, National Intelligence Council

SUBJECT : What It Will Take to Turn the Tide in El Salvador --
The Vietnam Precedent

1. There is no direct Vietnam precedent as far as the Intelligence Community's input was concerned: The question -- What will it take to turn the tide in Vietnam? -- was handled for the most part in policymaking forums. Intelligence judgments did contribute indirectly to the question, however, via the NIEs and SNIEs of the mid-1960's, and through other work by the Office of National Estimates (the then NIC) and the DCI's Special Assistant for Vietnam Affairs.

2. That indirect contribution came through numerous estimates of the situation and of the likely results to be achieved by various US polity or tactical options. Though usually addressing only partial segments of the general question of what was necessary to turn the tide, these estimates did add up to a fairly broad shopping list of necessary measures: e.g., x degree of US military force; plus substantial specific improvements in the military and political character of the South Vietnamese government. For anything short of a totality of such measures, the intelligence judgments were consistently fairly pessimistic: the tide would not be turned.

3. It should be noted that with the passage of time the definition of what was meant by turning the tide changed. Up until late 1965 or so, "turning the tide" meant getting North Vietnam to lay off or cut back heavily on its support of the Viet Cong. Thereafter US policymakers aimed a little lower: what it might take to get to get the North Vietnamese to negotiate a decent settlement. Even then, CIA and Intelligence Community judgments remained fairly pessimistic.

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